

Institution: Birkbeck

Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Studies

a. Context

The Department of Politics at Birkbeck has undertaken several initiatives during the REF2014 period to maximise the impact of its research beyond the academic sphere, including establishing the Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life, setting up a blog, and organising numerous public events. The wide range of the department's research has generated relationships with a variety of beneficiaries and stakeholders.

The main non-academic constituencies for the department's research during this assessment period have been:

- Politicians, including a number of MPs
- UK government bodies such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Civil society organisations, including advocacy groups such as the Electoral Reform Society and charitable organisations such as Filmclub
- International government bodies such as the European Commission, United Nations and US Naval War College
- Private sector bodies such as the Association for Convenience and Fuel Retailing (NACS)
- Think tanks such as the Brookings Institution, Demos and Rand Europe
- The general public, via public talks and events, as well as newspaper, radio, social media and television content

Through outreach to, and collaboration with, these groups, departmental research has contributed to public policy and service delivery, the efficacy of civil society organisations, and the creativity and cultural capital of British society.

b. Approach to impact

The department's approach to impact is to provide academic colleagues with contacts and resources which allow them to develop relationships with non-academic organisations and extend the reach of their research to extra-academic stakeholders. For example, colleagues working on foreign policy use Chatham House, which provides access to high level policymakers, diplomats and journalists. In the area of British politics and public policy, editorial connections to *Political Quarterly* magazine help colleagues to make an impact. This journal is widely read by UK policymakers and the department co-hosts a range of joint events and publications with it, involving journalists, politicians, civil servants and professionals from the third sector.

Our own students are important in facilitating impact. The department's programme of public events often draws on our graduates. A high proportion of our part-time postgraduate students are employed in the public and third sectors. Many have interests directly relevant to the research of staff in the department, thus enhancing the significance and public engagement of staff research. This also helps the department embrace stakeholder involvement in its approach to research, which facilitates impact. For example, one graduate is a Programme Director at the Institute for Government where he subsequently led the Transforming Whitehall Programme, while another is director of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). Both continue to maintain a close connection with Birkbeck researchers and collaborate where relevant.

The department is equally committed to public dissemination of research through accessible books, articles and podcasts, providing financial support for staff to launch books as well as supporting electronic platforms to enhance reach, such as the News section of the department's website, its new blog (10-gower-street.com) and its regular e-newsletter to 3300 subscribers; through its twitter feed (Birkbeck Politics has 805 followers, ranking 11th among Politics departments in the UK in May 2013) and Facebook page. Departmental colleagues feature regularly in Birkbeck podcasts, created in partnership with Backdoor Broadcasting. The department also encourages staff to respond positively to invitations from schools and several members of staff have visited schools to speak about their research.

Specific initiatives related to the department's research clusters have also enhanced impact. The **Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life (BPPL)** represents the coming to fruition of a sustained period of outreach to Westminster, with the department informed by, and informing, the concerns of Parliament, politicians, policymakers and political journalists. Launched in 2010, with a dedicated website, the Centre's Board reflects its extra-academic orientation, including Professor Tony Wright, a former MP, who joined the department in 2010, MPs Luciana Berger and Lisa Nandy, journalists including Jackie Ashley, and third sector activists such as Joe Irvin, who formerly worked as the Prime Minister's political secretary in the No 10 Policy Unit. A majority of department staff are active contributors to the Centre's activities and blog. The Centre has organised over 20 public events. Its website receives about 700 visitors and 1600 unique page views per month, much generated by its blog. It has benefited from several research grants (such as Lovenduski, Kaufmann and Harris, Campbell). These have enabled it to develop and enhance its working links to politicians and policymakers through impact events as well as the work of a number of doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers with connections to these sectors.

The **Population, Environment and Resources Group (PER)** was launched in 2012 after a successful colloquium on the geopolitics of energy resources in May 2009, organised by Alex Colas and co-sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Platform, an NGO focused on the arts and social activism. Since then the Group has stimulated staff plans for new events and collaborations. It exemplifies the department's commitment to collaborative activities with non-academics. For instance, Simon Ross of Population Matters attended the launch and publicised it on their website. Media coverage from a press release prompted the charity FilmClub to ask Eric Kaufmann for guidance on which locations in Britain to target its interethnic contact activities.

Further public impact has arisen from the engagement of the department's International Relations scholars with international stakeholders. Rob Singh's research on US foreign policy, for example, has been cited in the international media and by policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic, and he has received several invitations to address think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and American Enterprise Institute and brief FCO officials including the UK Ambassador to the US. Bousquet's work on warfare and conflict has led to invitations to address international military and security institutions in the US and Asia, including the US Naval War College and Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Group (US).

Colleagues have also had an impact through consultancy and advisory work. For example, Edwin Bacon's research on Russian and Soviet politics has led to a number of agencies, including government, international organisations, NGOs and the business community seeking his advice. He briefed the NATO Defense College seven times between 2008 and 2012, and has also briefed the UK Ambassador to Russia on Anglo-Russian relations and addressed the Foreign Press Association on Russian Politics. Willis Political Risk Register recruited him to write the quarterly Russia report and he has written focused recommendations for a major oil company, a financial services company, and a Commonwealth government.

As well as having access to departmental initiatives to promote impact, colleagues also make extensive use of the resources provided by the college in the form of institutes (see below) public lectures and seminars including, for example, the annual Orwell Lecture. The college plays a major role in public engagement, sponsoring topical public events in which staff in politics participate alongside academics from other disciplines.

c. Strategy and plans

The department's major research centre, the Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life (BPPL), is key to the development of its influence in government and within the British political sector more widely. Academic staff engaged with the Centre have gained a lot of experience since its inception. It is planned that in future they will work closely with the department's Publicity Officer and the School of Social Science's Digital, Online and Social Media Co-ordinator to raise the profile of the Centre among key stakeholders. Its website and blog will continue to improve and extend their scope, now that staff contributions have become more routine and expected. This will

Impact template (REF3a)

allow the department to respond to day-to-day developments, encouraging its researchers to show how their research is relevant to contemporary issues, complementing the department's active programme of public events and seminars. The impact of these events will be enhanced by regular production of podcasts and continued development of the Centre's social media presence.

The PER group aims to expand its programme of events and collaborative research (see REF 5), which will seek to engage stakeholders in this prominent field of public discussion. It is launching a new Masters program, distinct in Britain, which will facilitate impact through interaction with students from occupations connected to population, environment and resources.

Staff development and mentoring will encourage early career researchers to use BPPL or PER, as well as the College institutes, as venues for improving their research impact and developing their non-academic research networks. Staff are also encouraged to contribute to the department's recently developed blog, 10-gower-street.com. This offers a new platform for staff research to reach user groups.

The Department's international research profile and extra-academic impact depends on the strength and quality of colleagues' work. The department, as well as the School (see REF 5) will support these colleagues with time and competitive funding for the development of their research networks and outreach to non-academic stakeholders. Impact will also be reflected in staff recruitment and development. Our appointment of a former MP to a visiting professorship in the Department, as well as the engagement of political figures on the Board of the BPPL, indicates our commitment to ensuring that our research is fully engaged in contemporary political issues and policy concerns.

Complementing this work, the department will take advantage of a number of School and College initiatives which enable colleagues to organise high profile events. Members of the Department sit on the boards of the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (BISR) and the Birkbeck Institute for Humanities (BIH). Colleagues make extensive use of the resources provided by the two institutes which have a major role in public engagement, sponsoring topical public events in which staff in politics participate alongside academics from other disciplines. Both BIH and BISR have large and growing audiences for their events and podcasts, and a strong social media presence. The School's recently appointed Impacts and Knowledge Transfer Manager will provide opportunities for enhancing outreach, collaborative and public engagement skills for staff as well as offering strategic support as the department develops new impact pathways for research projects. The department will continue to build on its advantages, enhanced by its politically engaged research networks, central London location and, hence, proximity to Westminster and the headquarters of major international organisations. It will continue to leverage connections with alumni and cultivate its mature, part-time students to channel research impact to wider communities of stakeholders.

d. Relationship to case studies

The case study featuring Lovenduski's and Campbell's research on political recruitment and voter behaviour is emblematic of how the Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life, a cornerstone of our approach to impact, facilitated policy influence from departmental research in Gender and Politics.

The case study on religion and demographics reflects an important focus of the PER Group, and illustrates how the department supports the reach of its research through funding and enabling extra-academic public engagement activities. In this case, the department and School supported Kaufmann's work by hosting two book launches and four speaking events during 2009-12, two of which were podcasted.